



How to Talk to Kids about Potential Sexual Abuse

Creating an honest, low-pressure environment — one that makes kids feel comfortable talking — takes work. It's hard for parents or caregivers to know how to start those conversations.

But it's more important than ever to try. First, tell your child: **It's always okay to tell me when someone touches your body or makes you feel scared, uncomfortable, or "icky."** Then, continue to create an open environment by teaching young children:

1. The proper names for body parts

Do this early, and use the words (penis, vagina) regularly.

2. Some body parts are private

"Private parts" are called that because they're not for everyone. Sometimes, private parts need to be looked at or touched by adults — bathing, using the toilet, at the doctor — and you will tell your child when it's okay.

3. A "secret" or "private touch" won't necessarily feel bad

Talking about "good touch" and "bad touch" can confuse kids. Often, sexual touches don't hurt, and they might even tickle or feel good. But you can let kids know a "secret touch" is not something any adult should do.

4. Not to keep "secrets," even if someone asks them to

Perpetrators often approach kids two ways:

- * **Friendly:** "I love playing with you, but if you tell anyone else what we did, they won't let us play again."
- * **Threatening:** "This is our secret. If you tell anyone, I will tell them it was your idea, and you will get in trouble."

Tell your kids:

"No matter what anyone tells you, body secrets are not okay. You can always tell me. I will never be mad at you."

5. To tell if they're asked to touch someone else

Sexual abuse often begins with a perpetrator asking the child to touch them or someone else. This nuance is important. Children are literal, so if you ask, "Did anyone touch you?" the truth may be "no," when, in reality, the child was asked to touch someone else.

6. How to get out of scary situations (ex. code words)

Some children are uncomfortable saying "no," especially to adults. Tell your child: "If you are ever scared or feel funny, say you need to go to the bathroom and find an adult you trust or call/text me." Give older children a code word to use when they feel unsafe at home, with your guests, or when they are at someone else's house.

7. No one should take pictures or video of their body

Child Sexual Abuse Material is an epidemic, but parents often forget to explicitly tell children it's not okay for adults to take photos of their body. Say: "If anyone takes a picture of your private parts, tell me and I will help you."

8. These rules apply to other children

Child-on-child abuse is more common than people think. Tell your child: "You can always tell me if a friend does something that makes you uncomfortable. I will help you."

Learn more at ourkidscenter.com/learn



Our Kids is a Nashville-based clinic that provides expert medical evaluations and crisis counseling in response to concerns of child sexual abuse. For more, visit OurKidsCenter.com